

JAPAN UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF DAVID MITCHELL – SHADOW OF MURAKAMI

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David Mitchell's work was seriously influenced by Japan and Japanese literature. He was influenced especially by Haruki Murakami, who is one of the leading figures of this literature, as well as Japanese culture.

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We would not be wrong if we said that his attachment to Japan, or more precisely, his exposure to the culture of this country, played a significant role in the active inclusion of implicit expression mechanisms in the structure of David Mitchell's narrative. Thus, in many of his interviews, the writer has repeatedly admitted that the history, culture, and ethno-mental identity of this country play a significant role in the formation of his writer's taste and in shaping his wor-

ldview in the appropriate direction [5]. As it is known, David Mitchell, who devoted a significant part of his youth to teaching in Japan, got married to his Japanese colleague Keiko Yoshida right here, thereby becoming permanently “stuck” with Japanese culture, the mission of begging the Japanese mentality to the Anglo-Saxon cultural environment, a kind of “signature”.

The interest and desire to solve Japan, to understand Japanese culture, to study this wonderful Eastern symbols matrix full of secrets, prompted David Mitchell to travel to the four corners of the country, and encouraged the assimilation of Japanese national culture in authentic conditions. Not content with the collection of such an ethnographic-anthropological data base, became familiar with Japanese history, manuscripts of various types reflecting the country’s ethnocultural identity, and spent years studying Japanese culture, literature, and national moral and ethical codes [1]. As David Mitchell admitted at the presentation ceremony of the book “The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet”, the author began writing his work only after making sure that he was sufficiently familiar with Japanese literature, history, culture, mental awareness, cultural codes and symbols. It is known that David Mitchell’s writing talent manifested itself in full force after his arrival in Japan, and after moving to Hiroshima in 1984, he began his writing activities. Admitting that he is British by origin, that he has deep ties to this country in terms of his family roots, as well as that he is a child of this country with his primary education, the writer emphasizes that he has not lived in this country since the 90s of the 20th century. Admitting that there is an opportunity to assimilate Japanese culture from youth, David Mitchell noted that contact with different cultures is very painful and difficult for people at a later age [4].

David Mitchell, while admitting his changing tastes based on his close familiarity with Japanese literature, admitted that as he got older he preferred the works of more diverse authors. In this sense, no one can doubt that Haruki Murakami is included in that list. Thus, the researchers who studied the writer’s work almost unanimously emphasized that his prose, especially in the initial stage of his work, reflects the influence of his Japanese colleague Haruki Murakami [3]. Some analysts even go a bit further and call David Mitchell “the English Murakami”. Ch. Nehei, one of the researchers who drew attention to this parallelism, notes that David Mitchell and Haruki Murakami dismantled the predictions about Japan in the world literary environment and the stereotyping of Japanese culture. That is, if the Japan depicted in James Caldwell’s famous book *Shogun* published in 1975 is crueler, more ruthless, colder and less empathetic. Thanks to this prediction, a

completely different image of Japan was presented to literature lovers around the world in the works of both David Mitchell and Haruki Murakami. As one of the great writers who helped to see the mental identity of real Japan behind the clichéd image, we think it is needless to say that David Mitchell's work is especially loved in the country for this exceptional service alone.

For the sake of objectivity, we should note that David Mitchell acknowledged this influence about fifteen years ago (in 2008) and accepted that he was inspired and benefited from the creativity, style, and writing skills of his older colleagues. Along with Nabokov, M. Spark, Ursula K. Le Quine, Haruki is among the great talented pen artists he was influenced by. Murakami's name was mentioned in particular [6]. Assessing the influence of the Japanese factor on his development, David Mitchell admits that the main reason for the internal reflections of his heroes, i.e. internal monologues, autoaggressive thoughts, as well as self-dialogues in his works, is that he sufficiently describes the great period of his life, especially the stage when he began to form as a writer. It is caused by feeling like an outsider, an abandoned being in the closed Japanese cultural environment. In other words, he transferred the painful experience of his integration into the Japanese culture, the hunger of communication he experienced at that time, the insufficiency of communication, and therefore the essential resources of introverted expression into the structure of his works. It is interesting that David Mitchell was not satisfied with the recognition of his influence from Japanese culture, but also evaluated the images and plots of British literature brought to this country in the status of a literary analyst. Thus, stressing that the unceasing popularity of Jane Austen, the literary genius's predecessor, seriously spread to Japanese literature, in this context, Karen Tei conducted an extensive analysis of Yamashita's work ("Sansei and Sensibility").

Namely, the researchers who noticed the serious traces of this influence created researches dedicated to the influence of Haruki Murakami's creative identity in David Mitchell's "Japanese" novels (this conventional name belongs to the researcher Y. Prasol. – A.B.). Specifically, in Y. Prasol's research covering the topic of literary representation of Japan in the works of Haruki Murakami and David Mitchell, a wide-spectrum analysis of the expression of direct intercultural dialogue from the format of literary reality was significantly included.

It should be noted that the researcher who evaluates the aspects of influence of Haruki Murakami's creativity on David Mitchell's production touches on an interesting point in his other study: Y. Prasol, who admires the wonderfulness of Haruki Murakami's talent, preserves his creative individuality

in his production format, thanks to his postmodern irony, Japan in a kind of parody style succeeded in reviving a different deconstruction of his image and related stereotypes. So, as Y. Prasol emphasized, David Mitchell fought with stereotypes about Japan and exposed them; the writer simply expressed his sarcastic view of those stereotypes by looking at this country from the prism of postmodern irony.

Admiration of Haruki Murakami's work does not bypass the allusive catalog of the writer's works: the author, who gives a lot of space to intertextual references, allusive names, and plot "sends" in his works, mentioned the name of his deeply respected Japanese colleague in his works. For example, in his "Ghostwritten" we read: "These paperback classics, they fly off the shelves. I remember you saying you enjoyed *The Great Gatsby* — there's a new Murakami translation of Fitzgerald's short stories we've just introduced, *Lord of the Flies*, which is a laugh a minute..." It should be recalled that, indeed, as mentioned in the language of the hero of David Mitchell's work, Haruki Murakami, who was an ardent admirer of F. Scott Fitzgerald's early work, who valued Fitzgerald as his literary hero, wrote a number of his stories, including his unfinished short works, translated into the native language. By the way, let's also note that he repeatedly expressed his deep respect for Haruki Murakami's work, appeared in the British press with reviews of his works, and evaluated them at the level of literary masterpieces. For David Mitchell, Haruki Murakami is an undoubted authority, a literary hero-standard to be deeply respected.

Another point is in the novel "Ghostwritten". Thus, the author mentioning Haruki Murakami in the context of the description of the restaurant menu, also refers to the famous gastronomic sketches of his Japanese colleague: "but then I could look at the restaurant menu and see traces of Murakami everywhere..."

It should be noted that in the history of literature, Haruki Murakami is among the authors who consider food and gastronomic descriptions as tools that help the supporting character of the work, the opening of the inner world of the characters, and the development of the plot line in the desired direction. In this sense, it is no coincidence that David Mitchell's hero expresses the connection between the restaurant menu and the image of Haruki Murakami. As one of the unique transitional means of David Mitchell's evocation, by including other literary text (intertext) in the plot line, he enters into a dialogue with his prepared reader about known texts, and also achieves a more vivid expression and presentation of the described situation.

Likewise, critics, analysts, and literary scholars have repeatedly pointed out that Haruki Murakami's influence in the work "Ghostwritten" is particularly strong.

Another interesting point that connects David Mitchell to Japan is related to his family. So, the son of David Mitchell, who is married to a Japanese woman, is autistic. In 2013, together with his wife Keiko Yoshida, he translated Naoki Higashida's *The Reason I Jump: A Boy's Voice from the Silence of Autism*, about a 13-year-old Japanese autistic boy. In his foreword to the book, David Mitchell once again revealed his creative talent and spoke eloquently and comprehensively about the mental, psychological, and social consequences of the autism problem, and most importantly, as a person who has faced this problem in the closest way, with high empathy [2]. In 2017, he translated another book written by David Mitchell and his wife, Higashida, "Fall Down 7 times, get up 8: A young man's voice from the silence of autism".

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